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ABSTRACT

Although much is known about how governments and major media organizations stand on some world press problems, some important actors in the debate--small- and medium-size newspapers in the United States--have been ignored. The editors of these newspapers are gatekeepers who, like their counterparts on large elite newspapers, play a fundamental role in determining the images of the world which their readers receive. To measure "typical" American editors' views of what are the most important problems facing the world press, editorial staffs of 31 small- and 30 medium-size daily newspapers and 38 state newspapers (largest daily newspaper in the state) answered questionnaires (an overall response rate of 66%). Findings indicate that the editors on these newspapers regarded government pressure on the press, such as governmental controls, closings of newspapers, and gags on the press, as a major problem. Other problems which emerged from the analysis but which were not seen as important included development-related problems, coverage of the Third World, and professional needs of the newspaper industry. Results also suggest that the concerns of the world press problems among the editors of small- and medium-size daily newspapers may not be greatly different from the concerns of the large, elite press. (Thirty notes and three tables are included.) (MS)

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U.S. EDITORS' PERCEPTIONS OF WORLD PRESS PROBLEMS: AN AGENDA FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

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U.S. EDITORS' PERCEPTIONS OF WORLD PRESS PROBLEMS: AN AGENDA FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As the global village becomes a reality through the news media, we witness more and more interest in world press issues. Different societies attribute different functions to the press: In western societies, the press should function to inform the public; in communist societies, the press should support government policies; in developing societies, the press should stimulate national development (1). All these societies are in agreement on one point: the press serves an important societal role. Therefore, concern for the problems of the world's press is growing. While this concern may be limited outside the halls of governments and news organizations, it has grabbed the attention of journalists and policy analysts. Organizations have been created that study the press. Other groups have formed to represent the world's press in battles against individuals, institutions, and governments whenever press rights have been threatened. Although we know a good deal about how governments and major media organizations stand on some world press problems, important actors in the debate--- small- and medium-size daily newspapers in the United States--- have been ignored. The present study sought their views on world press problems.

Because the news media and their content are important to the world and its leaders, the world's press are in the spotlight more and more (2). Today it is not unusual to hear reports of journalists who have had their lives taken or threatened, or their property confiscated, or their publications or stations shut down or taken over.

However, many news media organizations have taken the lead as spokespeople for their oppressed colleagues elsewhere in the world. This is particularly true in the United States, where journalists have taken on the responsibility of leading the world's democratic press just as its government claims to be a spokesperson for democratic causes.

The body of literature concerning itself with world press problems and issues is increasing (3). While the literature often looks at the values and positions held by leaders of the American "prestige" or "elite" press, research does not report the perceptions of journalists at small and medium-size newspapers (4). The prestige press is clearly central in providing world information to the citizens of democratic societies (5). The world prestige press also often takes the role of industry voices. But we often ignore the non-prestige press in world press research. It is apparent today that it is no longer the prestige newspapers in the United States which are opinion leaders on world press problems. Numerous industry leaders today come

from the ranks of the medium and small newspapers of the hemisphere as well as the largest newspapers (6).

The editors of these small newspapers are gatekeepers who, like their counterparts on large elite newspapers, play an important role in determining the images of the world which their readers receive. In regard to world press problems, which are often news items, these "gatekeepers" often set the agenda for which problems will be addressed and which will not. Gans characterized gatekeepers as "power distributors" because they give publicity to social movements, candidacies, and the like (7). Gans has asserted that their values are often unwittingly translated into the day's news (8). The press often reports about press problems in the United States and the rest of the world. Consequently, if these gatekeepers feel a world press problem is important, such as the spring 1987 staff cutbacks by CBS, the nation, and often, the world hears about it (9). Journalists covering political change in South Africa have reported about press violations as well as human rights violations (10). And the world's attention was drawn to the case of Nicaraguan journalist Pedro Joaquin Chamorro Cardenal, who was murdered in 1978 for his opposition to the then powerful Samoza government (11).

The issues involving the world press are wide in scope and well documented. These problems have included censorship and information regulation, press freedom and press responsibility, the role of the news media in national

development--- especially in regard to Third World countries --- international news flows, propaganda in international news content, labor and management problems, and new technologies for worldwide communication systems (12). Though there appears to be a long laundry list of problems, there is little agreement as to which problems are most important and worth addressing.

Ghorpade surveyed Third World- and Western-based correspondents in Washingto, D.C., to determine what they regarded as the most important world press problems. Ghorpade found that Third World correspondents were significantly more likely to agree with statements about Western domination of news flow, biased reports about the Third World, and Western control of news transmission hardware than the Western correspondents. But both groups of correspondents agreed that the Western press tended to ignore the Third World. Western journalists were significantly more likely to agree with one of the five Western statements about government control of Third World media than Third World correspondents, although a majority of both groups agreed that government interference with press freedom was a serious world press problem. There was no difference between the groups concerning other statements on poor access to Third World sources, need to upgrade Third World hardware, training for Third World journalists, and taxes/restrictions on Third World media (13).

Another issue to surface in the literature is education and training of journalists, particularly those in the Third World. Ghorpade noted this as important to foreign correspondents and Rota described a period of change in Latin America featuring accelerated growth in journalism education but concern for quality of journalism education and overall adequacy for the needs of Latin America (14).

Clearly one of the issues to receive significant attention in recent years is the UNESCO-proposed New World Information and Communication Order. While the proposal is now 14 years old, its worldwide debate has kept it at the top of many world press issue lists (15). Riding beside the New World Information and Communication Order issue is the issue of development communication. Ogan calls this concept the heart of the UNESCO proposal. It is clear, regardless of which side of the New World Information and Communication Order coin, that the world press considers development journalism--- including economic, social, and governmental/ political development--- a major issue. Its role in the debate has been central, as Ogan notes, for almost 20 years (16).

Flow of information was an issue identified by Ivacic. Improvement of the amount and presentation of news from Third World nations is dependent on national news agencies and the Non-Aligned News Agencies Pool, formed in 1975. The issue, according to Ivacic, is to develop "a freer and multidimensional flow of information" (17).

Link calls cultural dependency a serious international media issue, partly because of UNESCO's attention to the media and because of proponents' interest in a "balanced flow" of international news. The idea here, of course, is cultural imperialism--- the risk that the mass media introduce what Link calls an "alien culture" that contaminates pristine, indigenous cultures (18).

Similarly, Reyes Matta said dependence on the U.S. journalism model and international news agencies has caused the Latin American press to view news "through foreign eyes." Reyes Matta wrote: "It is clear that the transnational news agencies not only determine what the Latin Americans read, but what other nations read about them." As a result, images of Latin America in the news are distorted--- not necessarily false presentation of facts, but often arbitrary selection of facts--- by exaggeration of importance, by isolation of events, by viewing favorable consequences to the originating agency or country doing the reporting, by preconditioning facts for the purpose of conditioning later behavior, and by not covering events or situations at all (19).

The issue of news media stereotyping, including groups, cultures, and even developing nations, is being reassessed in current research (20). Another world press problem that has surfaced in the professional literature concerns violence against journalists. The problem has been a recurring concern expressed by numerous world organizations,

including the World Press Freedom Committee (21), the Inter American Press Association (22), and Committee to Protect Journalists (23). Governmental restrictions on the press are also widely mentioned in written discussions (24), as are censorship (25), access to information (26), and alternative sources of information (27).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present study sought to measure "typical" American editors' views of what are the most important problems facing the world press. Past studies concerning press views of world problems have focused too heavily on the elite press. In the United States, it is important to study the elite news media because they undoubtedly take leadership roles in representing the American views on world press problems. This study sought to directly measure the views of the small- and medium-size daily newspapers of the United States. How will they view world press problems? Will they view world press problems in the traditional American notion of "freedom of the press," where a free and independent press should be permitted to report as it pleases? How will the small- and medium-size news media react to some Third World notions that the press should participate in solving social problems? And what about financial problems? Technological problems? Physical violence against journalists? Matters dealing with professionalism?

From the discussion of the literature, the following research questions were examined:

1. What do American newspaper editors on small- and medium-size daily newspapers regard as the major problems facing the world press today?

2. How important do these newspaper editors regard each of these problems to be?

3. Is there any difference, based on newspaper circulation or state and regional influence, in the perceptions of newspaper editors about major problems facing the world press today?

METHOD

To answer these questions, questionnaires with stamped, self-addressed return envelopes were mailed to the editorial staffs of small- and medium-size daily newspapers. The questionnaires were addressed to the foreign editors listed in the 1986 Editor and Publisher International Yearbook (28). If the directory did not list a foreign editor, the next alternatives were the managing editor or editor, in that order. The sample of small newspapers consisted of a random sample of 50 daily newspapers with weekday circulations of 50,000 or less, taken from the directory. The sample of medium newspapers consisted of 50 daily newspapers with weekday circulations ranging from 50,000 to 100,000. In both of the preceding samples, if the newspaper selected was the largest circulation daily newspaper in the

state it was not selected into the sample because it fell into the next group examined in the study, the population of the largest daily newspapers in each state. In many cases these newspapers were not large or nationally prestigous newspapers, but their circulations relative to those of other daily newspapers in the state meant that these newspapers were influential within their states or regions. In several cases the editors mentioned they passed on the questionnaires to someone more knowledgeable about newsroom policies. In one case, the questionnaire was filled out by a group of newsroom personnel.

Editors were asked to evaluate a list of 42 problems facing the world press using a zero to 100 scale, with zero indicating the issue was not important at all and 100 indicating the problem was extremely important. Questionnaires were mailed in mid-December 1986. A second wave was mailed in early February 1987. The editors were informed: "We are trying to create an agenda of the most important problems currently facing the world press community." It was emphasized in the cover letter that the editors should evaluate the problems in regard to their importance. The purpose was to create an agenda of issues so as to determine which of the many problems facing the world press were especially worth addressing: "That is, regardless of how you personally feel about these matters, how important do you feel they are as issues worth addressing in

some way or another by the world press community?" (original emphasis) (29).

The items were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences subprogram for varimax rotation factor analysis (30). Since this is an exploratory study, and a factor analysis with 42 items is bound to yield unwieldly results, several factor analyses were run with items excluded after each run if the items failed to load well until interpretable results emerged. Therefore, for items to remain in subsequent analyses after the initial varimax rotation, a priori criteria were set at a minimum loading coefficient of at least 0.50 on a factor with the item loading no higher than 0.35 on a second factor. The initial varimax rotation yielded an 11-factor solution that accounted for 78 percent of the variance. From that, after items that failed to attain the a priori criteria were excluded, a seven-factor solution with 29 items accounting for 72 percent of the variance emerged. From that, a five-factor solution with 20 items accounting for 73 percent of the variance was found. Finally, a four- factor solution with 17 items accounting for 71 percent of the variance emerged. Each factor in this final solution had an eigenvalue of at least 1.0 (unity), and at least three issue statements loaded on each factor.

FINDINGS

The two waves yielded a total of 99 of the 150 newspapers, a response rate of 66.0 percent. The responses were 31 small newspapers; 30 medium newspapers; and 38 state newspapers.

TABLE 1 GOES ABOUT HERE

Factor one had the largest number of items and accounted for the most variance (38 percent). Each statement in this factor deals with pressure put on the press by governments. Each statement in this factor contained the word "government". The pressure factor consisted of the following statements:

a. Gags, blackouts on reporting imposed by government (gags)

b. Pre-publication censorship by government officials (censorship)

c. Government control of the press (controls)

d. Government reluctance to release information (reluctance)

e. Government secrecy (secrecy)

f. Closings of newspapers by governments (closings)

g. Government pressure to manipulate the press (pressure).

The second factor contained four statements dealing with the use of the press to serve, promote, or develop some presumably positive function for society. The development factor, which accounted for an additional 18 percent of the variance, consisted of the following statements:

a. Use of the news media to promote national culture (culture)

b. Use of newspapers to stimulate economic development (economy)

c. Use of newspapers to stimulate social development (social)

d. Use of news media to boost democracy and pluralism (democracy).

The third factor consisted of three items, each dealing with news coverage in developing nations. This factor, which accounted for 8 percent of the variance, consisted of the following items:

a. Lack of news from news services about developing nations (lack)

b. Lack of "positive news" about developing nations (positive news)

c. Need for more news about developing nations (more news).

Finally, the fourth factor, professional needs, consisted of three statements, two of which dealt with the specific needs of the world press to improve itself through training and other assistance. A third item, pointing to the

other side of the coin concerning professional needs, pointed to the reliance on foreign news services and syndicates. This might imply the need for assistance and training to decrease dependency on foreign sources of news. This needs factor accounted for 7 percent of the variance and contained the following:

a. Scholarships and financial assistance (assistance)

b. Government aid in training journalists (training)

c. Reliance of newspapers on news services, syndicates (reliance).

The grand means on each factor are reported in Table 1. These point to the high degree of importance which the editors assign to the pressure factor. T-tests among the four factors' grand means showed that every factor is significantly different from every other factor. It is interesting to note that a statement on the UNESCO-proposed New World Information and Communication Order, which did not load on any of the four factors, yielded a large non-response rate. Twenty-one of the editors (21.2 percent) either did not respond to the question or did not know what the New World Information and Communication Order was, a far greater non-response rate than for any other statement. There were no more than four don't knows or refusals to any other statement. In addition, of those 78 editors who did respond to the New World Information and Communication proposal item, responses tended toward either side of the

distribution. There were 18 zero responses and 20 one hundred responses.

The Pearson correlation matrix of the factors in Table 2 shows most of the factors were reasonably independent of each other. The correlations ranged from a low 0.18 between pressure and needs to a modest 0.52 between promotion and coverage:

TABLE 2 GOES ABOUT HERE

To examine the third research question concerning whether newspaper circulation and state or regional importance made any difference in how the editors regarded world press problems, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), where the mean response of each newspaper on each of the four factors, was computed as a function of newspaper size. Table 3, which shows the one-way ANOVAs, shows no significant results among the three different groups of newspapers examined in this study.

TABLE 3 GOES ABOUT HERE

DISCUSSION

This study examined what editors on small- and medium-size newspapers in the United States regard as the most important world press problems. U.S. news media organizations, especially the elite daily newspapers, have taken on the responsibility of supporting international freedom of the press, acting as spokespersons for their oppressed bretheren around the world. But little is known about how the majority of American daily newspapers, the small- and medium-size daily newspapers, which participate in press organizations and report about world press problems, regard world press problems.

It was found that the editors on these newspapers regarded government pressure on the press as a major problem --- perhaps the overwhelming problem. Such matters as governmental controls on the press, closings of newspapers, gags on the press, and similar matters were evaluated as vitally important.

Other problems to emerge from the analysis included development-related problems, coverage of the Third World, and professional needs of the newspaper industry. Though the analysis showed that the editors were aware of these problems, it also showed that they did not regard these problems as very important. These concerns are typically the concerns of Third World professionals and scholars.

Despite the controversy surrounding the New World Information and Communication Order raging in UNESCO, more than a fifth of the respondents voluntarily admitted lack of

knowledge about this issue or refused to respond. Much of the interest surrounding the New World Information and Communication Order has been at the affective level; specifically the way in which scholars and journalists evaluate the various advantages and disadvantages of the issue. Discussions have often lead to heated debates. But the results of this study suggest that the debate may be limited to scholars and the elite press.

The results of this study suggest that the concerns of the world press problems among the editors of small- and medium-size daily newspapers may not be greatly different from the concerns of the large, elite press. The newspapers were concerned with "freedom of the press," especially in regard to governmental pressures to manipulate or control the press. The editors were not particularly concerned with using the press for promoting national development, coverage of the Third World, or professional needs. Though the concerns of small- and medium-size daily newspapers may be similar to their larger and more prestigous counterparts, there is reason to suspect that their levels of knowledge and awareness of some of the controversial issues and problems may be limited.

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29. The list included 42 problem statements presented to the respondents in randomized order. The statements were: 1. Objectivity in news reporting and writing; 2. Freedom of the press; 3. Concentration of newspaper ownership; 4. The need for more newspapers; 5. Reliance of newspapers on news services, syndicates; 6. Freedom of information; 7. Import taxes on newsprint, ink, equipment; 8. Terrorism and

violence against journalists; 9. Right to reply in newspapers; 10. Scholarships and financial assistance; 11. Compulsary licensing of journalists; 12. Establishment of New World Information Order; 13. Closings of newspapers by governments; 14. Government pressure to manipulate the press; 15. Excessive taxes on newspapers; 16. Awards and honors for professional excellence; 17. Use of news media to boost democracy and pluralism; 18. Use of confidential sources by journalists; 19. Lack of competition in the newspaper industry; 20. Right of newspapers to refuse advertising; 21. Government aid in training journalists; 22. Use of news media/world press to promote world peace; 23. Mid-career technical training for journalists; 24. Government secrecy' 25. Physical dangers to journalists in the field; 26. Pre-publication censorship by government officials; 27. Use of news media to promote national culture; 28. Need to disseminate news more rapidly; 29. Lack of news from news services about developing nations; 30. Government reluctance to release information; 31. Gags, blackouts on reporting imposed by government; 32. Journalists' right to protect their sources; 33. Newspapers' adoption of new technologies; 34. Injection of politics in news reporting; 35. Need for news services for developing nations; 36. Use of newspapers to stimulate social development; 37. Portrayal of developing nations in stereotypical fashion; 38. Government control of the press; 39. Use of newspapers to stimulate economic development; 40.

Lack of "positive news" about developing nations; 41. Unions and other employment organizations; 42. Need for more news about developing nations.

Editors were told that this list came from interviews with journalists in the United States and elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere as well as a review of the literature. We also mentioned that we would be contacting editors at newspapers in Latin America and the Caribbean region in this study. This is presently underway, but because of tghe paucity of responses from the Latin American and Caribbean editors so far, those data cannot be presented at this time.

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TABLE 1

VARIMAX ROTATED FACTOR MATRIX OF WORLD PRESS PROBLEMS

Item	(Mean, SD)	Factor 1 Pressure	Factor 2 Developmt	Factor 3 Coverage	Factor 4 Needs	h2
Gags	(86.9, 19.9)	.92	.07	.16	.04	.89
Censorship	(88.8, 18.6)	.84	.03	.22	.06	.75
Reluctance	(81.8, 22.1)	.77	.16	.21	.01	.84
Controls	(92.0, 15.2)	.75	.02	.02	.15	.63
Secrecy	(87.5, 16.5)	.71	.07	.12	.00	.68
Closings	(89.8, 16.2)	.66	.19	.01	.02	.61
Pressure	(89.8, 15.0)	.60	.06	.11	.08	.48
Factor grand mean = 88.1.						
Culture	(42.4, 28.8)	.09	.82	.29	.07	.71
Economy	(48.4, 29.6)	.11	.82	.15	.25	.74
Social	(48.3, 32.1)	.18	.71	.34	.26	.72
Democracy	(52.3, 31.5)	.06	.64	.04	.18	.53
Factor grand mean = 47.9.						
Lack news	(60.3, 28.9)	.25	.26	.83	.17	.78
Pos. news	(54.0, 29.3)	.13	.21	.75	.28	.70
More news	(57.8, 28.4)	.27	.22	.72	.22	.74
Factor grand mean = 57.4.						
Assistance	(48.0, 26.4)	.14	.26	.25	.76	.67
Reliance	(43.9, 26.9)	-.04	.12	.09	.60	.49
Training	(34.8, 31.7)	.11	.18	.18	.54	.42
Factor grand mean = 42.2.						
Variance		38%	18%	8%	7%	
Eigenvalue		6.43	3.09	1.38	1.21	
Alpha (reliability)		.92	.85	.87	.71	

TABLE 2

PEARSON CORRELATION MATRIX OF FACTORS

FACTOR	Pressure	Development	Coverage	Need
Pressure	---	.27**	.40***	.18*
Development	---	---	.52***	.46***
Coverage	---	---	---	.46***

* Significant at $p < 0.050$.
** Significant at $p < 0.010$.
***Significant at $p < 0.001$.

TABLE 3

ISSUE DIMENSIONS AS A FUNCTION OF NEWSPAPER SIZE:

ONE-WAY ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE

Source	SS	DF	MS	F	Signif.
			PRESSURE		
Total	18928.6	95			
Between	661.6	2	330.8	1.68	N.S.
Within	18267.0	93	196.4		
Means:	Small = 92.4				
	Medium = 86.4				
	State = 86.9				
			DEVELOPMENT		
Total	62743.7	95			
Between	516.6	2	258.3	0.39	N.S.
Within	62227.1	93	669.1		
Means:	Small = 48.0				
	Medium = 47.6				
	State = 48.0				
			COVERAGE		
Total	66934.6	95			
Between	1001.0	2	500.5	0.71	N.S.
Within	65933.6	93	709.0		
Means:	Small = 53.3				
	Medium = 61.6				
	State = 57.6				
			NEEDS		
Total	47658.3	94			
Between	2243.1	2	1121.6	2.27	N.S.
Within	45415.2	92	493.6		
Means:	Small = 40.3				
	Medium = 37.4				
	State = 48.5				